

**Neighborhood Ten Study
Committee Meeting #8
May 26, 2005
Transportation (cont.)**

Committee members present: Rebekah Kaufman, Henry Lukas, Joan Marszalek, Bill Forster, Sandra Uyterhoeven, Ravi Sundaram, Joshua Rowland, Peter Sturges, John Moukaud

Staff present: Elaine Thorne, Taha Jennings, Sue Clippinger, Susanne Rasmussen

Discussion:

Susanne Rasmussen, the Director of Environmental and Transportation Planning in the Community Development Department and Sue Clippinger, the Director of Traffic Parking and Transportation Department, reviewed answers to specific transportation questions that were received from the Study Committee prior to the meeting.

The following is a summary of the transportation questions, comments and suggestions compiled by the Study Committee with prepared responses from City staff, as well as discussion from the committee meeting.

SIGNAGE REQUESTS:

1. Install a **“No Trucks, No Buses”** sign in advance of **Huron Avenue on Fresh Pond Parkway east bound** (these could be similar to but smaller than the signs at the other end of Storrow Drive coming from the Airport and South East Expressway) in order to give drivers advance notice.
2. **Place “No Turns For Trucks or Buses” signs on Brattle Street at Fresh Pond Parkway.**

These are related to the truck restrictions on the State owned, DCR (Department of Conservation and Recreation) parkway. Before installing signs, it is important to understand what changes in truck routing are desired.

Trucks are allowed on Alewife Brook and Fresh Pond Parkways between Route 2 and Huron Ave, which is also Route 16, and west on Huron Ave to Aberdeen Ave and then to Mount Auburn Street.

3. Include information on the **amount of fines** as well as **a line on the street** so people know where to stop at the "Do Not Block the Intersection" sign at **Brattle Street and Lexington Avenue.**

The fine was recently increased to \$100. Placing a stop line on Brattle Street at Lexington is not recommended by staff since there is currently no stop sign or signal, and would likely confuse drivers. The best approach to this issue is to find ways to reduce the queue so Lexington Street is not blocked. Possibly working with DCR to investigate changes to the operation of the signal to reduce the queue. Another option is formalizing the two lane westbound approach to Fresh Pond Parkway with new pavement markings.

A committee member noted that the location of the “Do Not Block Intersection” sign does not make it clear that the sign refers to Lexington Avenue. There was a suggestion to more clearly mark the intersection.

4. **Repair or replace street signs** missing from both **Larchwood Drive and Larch Road at Fresh Pond Parkway (Boston bound side of the Parkway)**, and any other locations.

Five intersections have been reviewed and work orders prepared to replace all missing or damaged stop, one-way, and street name signs. The work will be completed in 4-6 weeks.

The Committee was also made aware that signs issues can be reported on-line at the City’s Traffic and Parking Department website.

TRAFFIC SIGNAL ISSUES:

1. Provide **immediate activation of the walk light** when button is pushed: on **Fresh Pond Parkway at Huron Avenue and at Brattle Street, and at Mount Auburn Street**, similar to the immediate-activation walk lights installed on Fresh Pond Parkway at the Concord Avenue crossing, between the rotaries, and just east of Fresh Pond Mobile. Pedestrians should be given a more proactive right of way.

These intersections are owned and operated by the State through the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). The examples given (Fresh Pond Parkway at Concord Avenue, between the rotaries, and just east of Fresh Pond Mobil) are special traffic signals that were installed exclusively for pedestrians. In contrast, the signals on Fresh Pond Parkway at Huron Avenue, Brattle Street, and at Mount Auburn Street serve multiple vehicle movements as well as pedestrians. For this reason, these traffic signals cannot to be set to immediately go to the WALK signal as soon as the button is pushed. These signals always cycle through each phase in the same order so the walk phase will not come on until the signal gets to that part of its cycle. If the button is not pushed then the walk phase will be skipped.

2. **Address timing issues with the traffic signal** at the intersection of **Mt. Auburn Street and Coolidge Avenue** by reducing the time for green light on Coolidge or replacing the signal on Coolidge with a permanent flashing yellow light. Usually there is minimal traffic from/unto Coolidge- yet the timing causes backups on Mt Auburn Street, while the green light for Coolidge stays on with zero cars. In addition to traffic congestion, this timing issue at times also presents a potentially serious problem for cars going west and making a turn onto Mt Auburn and finding themselves stuck on the parkway as the light at Coolidge/Mt. Auburn turns left and the lineup of cars is too long to clear the parkway.

A single controller operates the entire intersection of Coolidge Avenue, Fresh Pond Parkway and Mt Auburn Street. The Coolidge Avenue signal is running with other phases of the signal operation that may require it to be green for Coolidge Avenue even when there is no demand there because of timing needs in other parts of the intersection. Staff does not recommend removing the traffic signal at Coolidge Avenue. There is sufficient traffic exiting and turning left to warrant a signal there. In addition, removing the signal would create the same blockage problem that was identified at Lexington

Avenue. The City can request that DCR review the signal timing at this intersection and make any changes that would increase its efficiency.

Staff further noted that this is a complicated intersection with awkward geometry, and a very high volume of traffic. The Committee was advised to think about how high of a priority should be placed on putting significant effort into trying to get the DCR to do something with the intersection, which probably has very limited resources for this kind of a review, and may be further constrained by the complexity of the intersection and the capability of the controller.

A committee member asked if traffic signals are coordinated with one another in order to efficiently handle flow and queues. Staff answered that it was unclear how sophisticated signals controlled by the state are. In Cambridge, there is some coordination at the Aberdeen Avenue, Huron Avenue intersection using a camera as well as in the Prospect Street / Broadway area.

3. **Address the queues** at the intersections of **Brattle Street/Fresh Pond Lane and Brattle Street/Larch Road**: The long queues on Brattle nearly prohibit left turns from these side streets onto Brattle going toward Harvard Square, which is a neighborhood problem for the Larchwood area.

The signal timing at this intersection most likely operates consistently with DCR's general policy for high volume intersections. A long cycle for the heavy volume on Fresh Pond Parkway creates queues on Brattle. If Brattle queues were very short it might attract additional vehicles to use the intersection. The residents of this section of Brattle Street have also expressed concerns about vehicles speeding.

4. **Review the left turn lane** west bound on **Huron Avenue at Fresh Pond Parkway**.

We recognize the problem and are reviewing changes to the pavement markings to address the issue. The changes will be implemented this summer.

A committee member also noted that it is hard to turn left onto the Parkway from Huron Avenue because the opposite side of the intersection does not have a yellow or red light at that time.

ENFORCEMENT:

1. **Enforce the current restriction of trucks and buses** on the **Parkways and Memorial Drive**.

Given the high demand throughout the City for enforcement of moving violations, truck restrictions, etc., the Cambridge Police Department focuses on the streets under the City's jurisdiction. The need for enforcement on the DCR parkways is referred to the State Police for their staff to handle. The Cambridge Police can request increased enforcement from the State Police.

2. **Enforce truck speeds and safety** through Cambridge, especially on **Brattle Street**.

Specific enforcement requests such as this one are passed on to the Police Department's traffic unit. They deploy the truck enforcement team and also focus on areas in need of

moving violations enforcement. Enforcement on Brattle Street will be scheduled. Staff also informed the Committee there is demand at other locations, and they will not stay at a single location indefinitely.

3. Work to **reduce the hindrances to the MBTA bus schedules on Mount Auburn Street, Huron Avenue, and Concord Avenue.** Double parking and congestion are a problem, especially during rush hours.

This has been passed on to the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department's enforcement unit. The Parking Control Officers have been reminded to pay particular attention to double-parking violations and illegal parking in bus stops.

4. **Make curb cuts available in inclement weather.** Very often, for all of the snow removal that takes place curb cuts are not attended to and therefore people in wheelchairs or with hampered mobility in general have a very tough time navigating.

Snow shoveling on sidewalks is the responsibility of the property owner. Property owners are also responsible for clearing any disability ramps on the sidewalks adjacent to their property. Both the Traffic Department and the Public Works Department issue violations to property owners who fail to shovel their sidewalks or disability ramps. Violations can be called in to the DPW hotline at 617-349-4903 and a staff person will be sent out to issue a ticket. There was a question regarding enforcement mechanisms. Staff noted that violators are issued tickets, which if unpaid, are taken to court in batches.

DESIGN CHANGES:

1. **Add a bike lane** on Brattle Street allowing counter-one-way entry to Harvard Square from the intersection of **Brattle Street and Ash Street.** Despite the one-way sign currently in place, bicycles regularly enter Harvard Square against traffic because it's the shortest route.

This option was studied as part of the Harvard Square Design Study, which was recently completed. There were significant design challenges to create a safe operation given existing side streets, parked cars, and pedestrians. The Harvard Square Design Committee determined that the safest legal route for bicycles traveling toward Harvard Square on Brattle Street is to turn right at Hawthorne Street, which has a bicycle lane, and then left on Mt Auburn to access the Square. The TP&T department will install the bike routing signs to direct the bicyclists to this route.

A committee member stated that it would be challenging to get cyclists to follow the legal route if it is out of the way. Another committee member added: any signs need to be proximately displayed and clearer for cyclists. Staff pointed out that when there are good bike facilities there is greater adherence to the rules. Also, tickets for moving violations are issued to cyclists when necessary.

2. **Reconsider the purpose of 30-minute meters on Mount Auburn Street at Willard Street.** The businesses in the vicinity probably require greater than one hour parking, and especially on Saturdays.

The current 30-minute parking limit dates back to previous commercial uses (real estate agency) and can be changed to two hours. The time limited parking on the entire opposite side of Mt. Auburn from Fresh Pond Parkway to Hawthorne Street has a two hour parking limit and can accommodate the non-resident parking needs in this area. It was further noted that traffic calming is being considered for Mt Auburn Street, which is scheduled for repaving. The traffic calming plans may change the parking regulations at this location.

3. **Install a 4 way stop sign** at the intersection of **Vassal Lane and Reservoir Street**.

City staff has met with residents concerning speeds on Reservoir and issues at the Vassal Lane/Reservoir Street intersection. Traffic calming changes will be installed when roadway work is scheduled for Reservoir Street. Meanwhile, staff from the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department, Community Development Department and Arts Council Department are evaluating different pavement markings alternatives including artistic paint that could encourage drivers to reduce travel speed when approaching the intersection. Another community meeting will be held once a design for the markings has been developed.

4. There is a need to **slow down traffic** at the intersection of **Chilton and Huron Avenue**

When street work is scheduled for Huron Avenue, City staff will work with the community to develop a plan to slow traffic and improve pedestrian crossings on Huron Avenue. However, community support for any changes is essential.

A committee member pointed out that the speed limit on Huron Avenue is 25 mph while the speed limit on side streets is 30 mph. There was a question on the possibility of an overhead walkway on Fresh Pond Parkway. Staff noted that any ramp would have to be fully accessible and people tend not to use them. Staff also stated that there are no plans to change the concurrent green light / pedestrian crossing at intersections, which works as long as cars yield to pedestrians.

TRAFFIC CALMING:

Traffic Calming is proposed for the following locations for FY06:

1. Concord Avenue at Madison Street - Curb extensions in front of St. Peter's school.
2. Lakeview Avenue at Brattle Street and Huron Avenue - Curb extensions.
3. Grozier Road at Fresh Pond Parkway - Curb extension.
4. Mount Auburn at Sparks Street, Willard Street and Hawthorne Street - Crossing islands at the intersection of Mt. Auburn and Spark and Willard Streets and a raised crosswalk at the exclusive right turn lane from Mt. Auburn to Hawthorne St. (Also known as continuation of Memorial Drive). Two community meetings have been held. Residents expressed concerns about traffic flow. City staff is working on developing different alternatives to improve pedestrian safety and address residents concerns and will schedule another community meeting.

A committee member wanted to know what kind of pedestrian demand existed for traffic calming at Mount Auburn and Hawthorne, Sparks, Willard, and if there are priorities

among those three locations. Staff responded that complaints have been received regarding these locations.

A committee member suggested that the committee should support traffic calming in this location as well as more traffic calming pedestrian amenities throughout neighborhood. The intersection of Huron and Gurney Streets was also specifically mentioned as a location that should have traffic claming. Another committee member expressed concern about general support for traffic calming without taking into account the specific location, parking, snow plow operations, and traffic flow issues.

Staff stated that the traffic claming process involves consultations with the Fire Department, review by the Department of Public Works (in particular regarding snow plow operations), also, legal parking spaces are not usually lost when curb extensions and other traffic calming measures, are put in place.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

1. Compare **transportation levels** today to projections for 10 to 20 years in the future. Determine how changes in City policy and new development effect traffic congestion, parking, alternative modes of transportation, and development mitigation measures

During the Citywide rezoning study (1999), the City analyzed traffic projections for 20 years. The rezoning study resulted in reductions of allowed densities in many parts of the City. These zoning changes reduce the traffic volumes anticipated in the future. It was also noted that traffic projections are not usually very useful unless used in a comparative study. The City focuses on: addressing immediate real world concerns, options to reduce driving, and studies done in response to a specific zoning change or new development.

A committee member asked if gas prices have an effect on traffic levels. Staff noted that there was not evidence of that however; the economy has a large effect on traffic levels in the city.

2. Explore options to **further address traffic through Neighborhood Ten** on residential streets from the **Route 2 corridor**.

There are only two major roadways, Fresh Pond Parkway and Memorial Drive, which are expected to handle traffic through the neighborhood (no destination or origin). All other streets in the neighborhood are residential streets. However, they all handle some through traffic. It was further noted that there are not a lot of options in terms of moving volume around within the neighborhood.

Staff also pointed out that the City is currently requesting that the State conduct a study of use along the Route 2 corridor and related streets through Cambridge, involving the identification of licenses plates on automobiles and matching them to trip origins. The data would then be used to generate ideas for alternative transportation.

3. **Consider the effect and role that the Segway Transporter** may have on transportation in the City in the future. Including use on streets and sidewalks, if the City will officially encourage their use and how, where they can be parked/stored, and any incentives for their use.

The Traffic, Parking and Transportation regulations regulates the Segway's (Electronic Personal Assistive Mobility Device) use of city sidewalks in Article XXII. The Segway is subject to the same basic regulations as bicycles – they are restricted from some sidewalks (business districts) and required to go slowly and yield to pedestrians on the others. The regulations are available on line at <http://www.cambridgema.gov/traffic/parking>.

4. Work to keep the **elevator** in **Harvard Station** properly working, maintained, cleaned, and if necessary, repaired in a timely matter. When the only elevator in the station is out of service many people that rely on it are left with few options.

City transportation staff meets quarterly with the MBTA and have raised this issue. Complaints have also been voiced from others about the reliability of elevators and escalators throughout the system. The MBTA has appointed a person in charge of vertical transportation and has made Harvard Square their top priority.